The Retrograde

Monday, March 3, 2025

UTD's official, independently-run student newspaper.

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WEBSITE EXCLUSIVE Korean Language Club stuns with performance at iWeek talent show

WHAT'S INSIDE? How to betray a fanbase: the Luka Dončić Saga 6

Steam pipe repair outside Sirius Hall disrupts student routines

With construction scheduled to end by mid-March and fenced-off areas expected to open sooner, student inconveniences near their end

SHREYA RAVI | RETROGRADE STAFF

Construction trench running between the Central Utility Plant and Sirius Hall. Pedestrian pathways to reopen mid-March as contruction progresses. A plume of steam coming from the leaky steam pipe pictured in background.

MUAAZ ABED
Staff Writer

Construction in front of Sirius Hall, formerly known as Residence Hall South, has resulted in several key campus walkways being closed off, leaving students to find alternative routes to their classes.

The construction is a result of a project to replace a leaky steam line that runs from Sirius Hall to the Central Utility Plant. To ensure student safety during the construction, the stairway in front of Sirius Hall, the nearby sidewalk and portions of the adjacent parking lot have been fenced off. According to Kelly Kinnard, assistant vice president for facilities management, the construction was originally scheduled to conclude prior to the beginning of the semester, but unforeseen circumstances have delayed the project's completion to mid-March.

The delay has resulted in construction spilling into the spring semester, forcing students to find new paths that go around the fenced-off areas. Psychology freshman and Sirius Hall resident Chloe Yi has had to change how she gets around campus because of the construction.

"I used to walk down the stairs and take shortcuts to [my] classes, but now I have to walk fully around the parking lot," Yi said. "And everyone is kind of going there … so it does take a couple more minutes on my commute to school and to classes and even if I want to go to Taco Bell, I have to [take] a super long route."

Since the beginning of the construction, the work zone has steadily grown in size. The zone, originally consisting of the Sirius Hall parking lot's border with Rutford Avenue, quickly began covering the adjacent pathways in construction. Soon after, the construction zone in front of Sirius Hall ran from North Loop Road all the way down to the end of the Sirius Hall parking lot, leaving only the ramp to the Sciences Building unblocked by construction. Recently, half of the parking lot bordering the construction has been completely fenced off, leaving the area completely inaccessible to pedestrians. The route from Sirius Hall to Taco Bell that Yi described, which once took 10 seconds, now takes 90.

Because of the inconvenience posed by the construction, frustration has started to

SEE **CONSTRUCTION**, PAGE 2

ECS, BAHT spearhead new programs

A look into UTD's expansion and introduction of academic offerings across campus

CHRISTINA MINA
Staff Writer

UTD is set to introduce several new degree offerings across its schools over the next year, in an expansion aimed at meeting student demands and furthering the university's goal of career-focused learning.

Two schools are launching new programs in the next few semesters: the Erik Jonsson School of Engineering and Computer Science is preparing to unveil two new degree plans: a bachelor's in systems engineering and a bachelor's in materials science. The Bass School of Arts, Humanities and Technology is experiencing a boom in all types of academic offerings, ranging from two new traditional bachelor's degrees to new micro credentials and certifications.

The Department of Materials Science and Engineering has been a vital part of UTD for 20 years, but traditionally has only offered a graduate degree alongside a handful of undergraduate courses. Recently, UTD professors have recognized the growing appeal of an undergraduate degree in materials science and have worked alongside students and administration to develop a degree program for it. The new degree is designed to cater to the demand in North Texas for energy and technology materials experts. According to department head Manuel Quevedo-Lopez, the region will need approximately 18,000 materials experts over the next 5 years. With two of UTD's research trusts, including energy science and semiconductor science, the university is well posed to serve students looking to enter the niche sector of materials science. UTD will be the third university in Texas to offer this bachelor's degree and the only one in the country focusing on energy and semiconductors as specializations.

> "At the end of the day, we want our students to finish their major and get a great job … that reflects on the quality of education that we give them."
>
> **— Manuel Quevedo-Lopez**

While the department initially planned to release this degree for the fall 2025 semester, the timeline of approval from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board may mean the program's unveiling is postponed until fall 2026. Quevedo-Lopez took this potential delay in stride, citing the need for increased advertisement of the program to prospective students. Most critical to Quevedo-Lopez is ensuring job security for those completing the degree.

"At the end of the day, we want our students to finish their major and get a great job … that reflects on the quality of education that we give them," Quevedo-Lopez said. "If they finish and don't get a job, we have an unhappy student and that doesn't reflect well on our educational quality."

Likewise, Steve Yurkovich, the department head of systems engineering, has been leading the initiative to introduce a new bachelor's in systems engineering degree, set to launch fall 2025. The degree has a feature called a secondary degree requirement, where students customize their degree by selecting five courses as a specialization, either continuing to focus in systems or expanding their knowledge in fields such as electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, biomedical engineering or business. Yurkovich said that the goal was to create flexible multifaceted students, and the limits of their

SEE **DEGREES**, PAGE 2

ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

Student loan repayment, forgiveness targeted amid political tensions

The political dimensions of the PSLF program and legal challenges to income-based repayment plans have tangible repercussions for UTD faculty and future academics

ASHNA KARIA
Staff Writer

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

With recent legal challenges to income-based loan repayment plans, the already tedious and frustrating process of receiving student loan forgiveness has complicated further, taking more money out of students' and professors' pockets while exposing massive flaws in how post-graduate education is financed.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, authorized in 2007, allows full-time employees of a governmental or nonprofit organization to apply for loan forgiveness after 10 years of qualified employment and 120 months of payment. Under the Biden administration, the program underwent significant changes to expand eligibility and streamline the application process by creating an online portal for borrowers. Prior to 2021, only 7,000 applicants had received loan forgiveness, but as of October 2024, over $74 billion had been cleared from the accounts of over 1 million borrowers. Beneficiaries of this policy can be found in the ranks of UTD faculty, as professors of public universities qualify for the program.

Employees of tax-exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofits and government organizations on the federal, state and local levels are eligible for loan forgiveness if they carry a federal Direct Loan and are enrolled in a standard ten-year repayment plan or an income-driven repayment plan. These include Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE), Pay As You Earn (PAYE), Income-Based Repayment (IBR), and Income-Contingent Repayment (ICR). Of these, SAVE is generally the most affordable, offering lower monthly payments and an interest subsidy that was designed to ensure borrowers wouldn't find the value of

SEE **DEBT**, PAGE 3

Student Affairs reveals plan to revive *The Mercury*

UTD administration proposed new student media policy and moves forward with plan to restart *The Mercury* with a new editorial staff

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

At the Feb. 19 Academic Senate meeting, UTD administrators doubled down on claims that former Mercury staff resigned and indicated they were searching for new students to fill editorial positions at *The Mercury*.

The ad-hoc committee formed by Student Government in conjunction with Vice President Rafael Martín held its final meeting Jan. 29, proposing new university policy to oversee student media. The new policy would establish the Committee on Student Media as a replacement for the Student Media Operating Board, whose tasks will include overseeing all of UTD's student media and creating

SEE **MERCURY**, PAGE 3

UTD | COURTESY

Gene Fitch, vice president of Student Affairs, depicted wearing blue shirt and tie.

THE RETROGRADE
retrogradenews.com
theretrogradenews@gmail.com

Editor-in-Chief
Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez

Managing Editor
Maria Shaikh

Graphics Editor
Anika Sultana

Photo Editor
Katya Zakar

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UTD alums launch app to demystify congressional bills

Two alums hope to help Americans understand Congress' actions by creating an app for discussing legislation

MUAAZ ABED
Staff Writer

Aiming to facilitate political discourse among everyday Americans, two UTD alums launched White Paper, an application for discussing and understanding legislative actions of the U.S. Congress.

Congress oversees the legislation of federal bills and resolutions that affect the lives of all Americans, but despite its massive impact on the American populace, many Americans remain ignorant about what the nation's legislative branch is proposing or enacting into law. According to a 2023 Gallup poll, only 66% of Americans were aware of which political party has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. To facilitate more awareness of Congressional bills, resolutions and candidates that are relevant to everyday citizens' lives, data science alum Abdul Rafai and software engineering alum Inshal Haq designed White Paper around allowing users to discuss bills proposed by Congress.

"The motivation behind White Paper was to create a space to hold Congress accountable for their actions," Rafai said. "Currently, I think there's a lot ... going on. And is there a space specifically allocated for discussions around Congress and representatives and how you can hold them accountable? No, there isn't a space. There is Twitter, and people talk about [politics] on Twitter, but Twitter has everything, right? There's not a designated space for [politics]."

According to its website, Rafai originally created White Paper last year at UTD as a small semester project with the goal of helping users see — and potentially influence — what bills their Congressional representatives were supporting. Since its inception, the project's scope has grown. In addition to providing a platform to discuss Congress' actions, White Paper also gives users the ability to find their representatives in the House and Senate. Rafai considers this feature essential for anyone that wants to get started with White Paper.

"[The find representatives feature] is [the first] thing that we recommend people to do because a lot of people don't even know their current House rep," Rafai said. "They might know one senator that's popular, but a lot of people also don't know their senators."

Haq said he was recruited to design a mobile version of White Paper after pitching the concept to Rafai at the beginning of 2025, believing a mobile app would be more accessible to the public than a webpage. The app is tentatively scheduled to release on mobile storefronts between March and April of this year.

In addition to a new mobile app, Rafai and Haq said they are considering adding AI features to help users better understand the bills through summarization.

"Some bills have ... hundreds of pages of just text and it's a lot of jargon, [potentially] a lot of stuff people don't want to read through," Rafai said. "And so [we're thinking of] leveraging AI [to create] relevant summaries about what's relevant in the actual bill itself."

According to Rafai, a large portion of White Paper's growing userbase is driven by users who discover it through social media.

"We've had a few dozen users here and there, but then we'll have spikes based off of social media posts, or we'll [gain] a few hundred users because our posts will go ... popular," Rafai said. "We've seen this, and so far we've gotten really good feedback on social media where people have said, 'Oh wow, this is something that could be very useful, this is something we want to see.'"

According to Rafai, all the money going into developing White Paper either comes from the project's Patreon or the developers' own pockets. Rafai and Haq said they are willing to fund the project themselves if it means achieving their goal of helping citizens hold Congress accountable. Karl Ho, a political researcher and professor of instruction at EPPS, also believe that White Paper can improve public policy.

"If this app can provide a platform for the public to have discussions over the bills [that are] not the law yet, [then] I think it's a good thing," Ho said. "[Through discussion] we can get better policy and better consultation and get better information."

WHITE PAPER | COURTESY

Anyone interested in using White Paper can create an account on its website to begin proposing, discussing and rating bills. Users interested in finding their representatives can do so on the website without an account.

Rafai and Haq said that the project is still in its early stages with more features planned for the future. Rafai and Haq said they invite users to send them questions and ideas about features as development continues.

"Hopefully, this new [software] … allows our democracy to become better because the policy, the information is getting more open and more transparent," Ho said. "And if White Paper is showing this, [it] is a good sign."

Chess team crushes Kasparov Cup

UTD's chess team brings home first place

CHRISTINA MINA
Staff Writer

The UTD Chess A Team secured first place at the fifth annual Kasparov Chess Foundation University Cup on Feb. 1, beating 110 other teams across 25 different countries in the tournament.

The team consisted of four players: Grandmaster Ivan Schitco, GM Aditya Samant, GM Rahul Srivastava Peddi and Vignesh Anand. Each dominated their respective matches and contributed to UTD's stellar performance in the nine-round rapid-style event. The prize for first place is spending a day with former World Chess Champion Garry Kasparov.

The team spent about two weeks preparing for the tournament. While the players had already been training for their other spring tournaments, such as the Pan-American Collegiate Championship they played in early January, they spent the time leading up to KCF tailoring their practice to the fast-paced online format of the event. Schitco and Peddi said that online chess introduces different variables to the game that players must account for. Playing over a screen removes the physiological aspects of a chess game; factors like mouse speed can impact the game and shake up the playing field for even the most seasoned players.

"Getting better and better, you have to be addicted to that," Schitco said. "It's good to be competitive in life."

The first time this team participated in the Kasparov Chess Foundation cup, they reached the finals but ended up in second place following the tiebreaker. This year, they found themselves in a similar position, facing off in the finals against the team from Gunadarma University in Indonesia. The event came down to third board player Peddi, who was the one to play in the tiebreaker. Throughout the two-day tournament, Peddi had won in every one of his matches, apart from two draws. He continued that streak into the finals, playing a stellar game with no mistakes and bringing home the first-place title.

"I pretty much crushed him," Peddi said. "It turned out to be a good day."

UTD's win streak at the event did not stop with Team A's first-place win. Teams B and C finished second place in their respective categories, showcasing the university's chess excellence across the board. The players were extremely excited about the opportunity to meet and learn from Kasparov, the tournament's founder.

"I'm so excited to have a conversation with Garry Kasparov," Peddi said. "He's one of the greatest [players] ever, and with this event prize, that's one of the things I'm looking forward to."

With this win, UTD continues to dominate the collegiate chess world as one of the best schools in the country. According to Schitco, part of that success comes from all the players working well together.

"I would like to give a huge shoutout to my team, they did an amazing job this year," Schitco said. "We had great team chemistry, and everyone did great."

DEGREES
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

courses were simply dependent on what approvals they could obtain from their adviser and department head.

"One of the key tenets this whole degree is structured on is flexibility for the student," Yurkovich said.

Across campus, BAHT is introducing a new B.A. in animation and games alongside a range of smaller programs. The new minor in arts management and leadership, part of a merger with EPPS, aims to prepare students to assume behind-the-scenes roles in sectors like Dallas' arts district. The school is also releasing a minor in audio production, addressing the need for specialized technical training in the arts, and certifications in applied experience design and research as well as professional communication. Micro credentials, a new format offered by BAHT involving completing six credit hours in a particular field, include intercultural communication and legal research and writing.

While many of these offerings are either set to be released fall 2025 or are already available to current students, the school is also working on approving a B.A. in professional communications and visual media studies, as well as a minor in film production. According to dean Nils Roemer, these new programs were designed with a large focus on meeting the needs of students instead of just the incoming classes. Roemer said the school is currently working on hiring new staff to support this massive expansion and has already onboarded four new professors to the school as of January 2025.

"If you go into our theaters, if you go into my orchestra, into my choir, you'll see not just Bass students there but in the UTD choir you'll see large numbers of engineering students and computer science students, so on and so forth," Roemer said. "One thing we've been relaxing is, unlike my generation, the incoming students are focused on their majors, but it does not mean they may not want to be part of the 'Rent' musical or play an instrument in our band."

One common thread across both schools' academic expansion is awareness of the increased need for interdisciplinary professionals in the workforce. The U.S. job market is shifting away from rigid, single-sector career paths to an appreciation for flexible and adaptable professionals, which both schools' new offerings are hoping to help create at UTD.

"The world is changing around us," Roemer said. "The need for higher education is changing."

CONSTRUCTION
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

brew in students who used to travel through the blocked footpaths, leaving them to wonder why the university decided to undergo heavy construction during the semester.

"I was confused [by the construction] because they did have all of break to do it, so I thought it would be over by the time break [ended]," Yi said. "And then it became an inconvenience to walk around everywhere."

Ayush Sikdar, another student whose routine was affected by the construction, is disappointed in University Housing's lack of communication regarding the construction and when it will be completed.

"I think [University Housing] could have put out more flyers and anything that I can see physically to be able to find out about the construction, why it's happening and the time period of the construction because I don't think I'm that informed about it," Sikdar said.

However, students will not have to wait until mid-March to resume use of the affected pathways. According to Kinnard, there are already plans to open some fenced areas prior to the completion of the project.

"Closing the path locations and stairs was necessary to ensure pedestrian safety and still allow the work to continue," Kinnard said in an email. "As we complete sections [of construction], we will reopen pathways."

Kinnard said that this project is not the only project near University Housing planned for this semester. Students should look out for crews scheduled to install a shade outside of Helix Hall from mid-March to mid-July of this year.

Amid funding chaos, UTD offers support to faculty and programs facing cuts

The federal government's new funding freezes and limitations may slash UTD's research programs once the legal dust settles

Gregorio Olivares Gutierrez
Editor-in-Chief

In its first month of action, the Trump administration limited National Institute of Health and National Science Foundation grants, which could severely impact university research. UTD has instructed its faculty to keep doing their work and communicate in case any stops are issued against their research.

Rafael Martín, vice president and chief of staff, said to the Academic Senate on Feb. 19 that no specific decisions had impacted UTD's current research programs yet because many of them are caught up in the judicial system.

While current research remains untouched, Martín said that researchers should be more cautious with their expenditures, such as with the equipment they buy, during this uncertain period. Otherwise, they should continue paying salaries and conducting their established research for the time being.

Joseph Pancrazio, vice president for research and innovation, said his office will be closely tracking all the federal developments and was in communication with the UT System to discuss how to best handle the situation. As of the Feb. 19 meeting, Pancrazio said that three bridge loans have already been issued to help researchers facing grant issues because of federal activity.

"We want to protect the kids and post-doc staff, we want to make sure there is continuity in research operations," Pancrazio said. "We have resources that I have set aside for seed grants. If need be, we will pivot to meet current needs so that faculty may maintain research continuity."

Pancrazio said that any faculty experiencing issues with funding from their federal grants should reach out to his office immediately for support. Bridge loans will be provided on a case-by-case basis and include detailed discussions between the Office of Research and Innovation, the affected faculty, relevant department head and applicable dean.

Of particular concern was the new guidance issued by the NIH and similar federal organizations which limited indirect cost rates to 15% instead of the rates universities had previously negotiated with the government, which could range anywhere from 27% to 64% based on the institution. Ravi Prakash, computer science professor and Academic Senate member, said the university needed to have substantive preparations in place for this change because indirect costs are essential to running research.

Martín said that UTD would have little choice on how funds are redistributed and how costs are categorized, since they must wait on federal regulators to provide updated guidelines. Pancrazio said the goal of current talks with legislators is to mitigate the negative effects of the 15% cap, which would make all research on campus more costly to pursue because of decreased federal support.

"There is communication with federal legislators in a manner I hope where we can play the long game to impact what the IDC rates will be," Pancrazio said. "It absolutely impacts us, and the question is how [much]?"

The Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 plan argued for capping indirect costs at universities because "universities also use this influx of cash to pay for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts." UTD's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and its successor, the Office of Campus Resources and Support, were both eliminated as part of the university's compliance with SB-17. Prakash said the UT System needs to advocate publicly for itself and its faculty because an incorrect image of what universities do is taking hold with the public.

> "We have resources that I have set aside for seed grants. If need be, we will pivot to meet current needs so that faculty may maintain research continuity."
>
> — **Joseph Pancrazio**

"We are losing the battle of public opinion, and somebody in the UT System needs to be writing op-eds and holding press conferences to reach out to the public," Prakash said. "The chancellor keeps telling us that the public has a very low opinion of higher education, but what is he doing about it?"

Martín said it would be more effective to wait for the UT System to speak, instead of having one university attempt to make an impact. Pancrazio said that high-ranking administrators like himself and Martín have the least sway over the public.

"If I was reading an article from an administrator that said, 'Give me some more money,' more that was perceived as excess, then I would never give it the time or the attention," Pancrazio said. "Our best advocates aren't going to be in administrators. You expect the fat cats to say, 'Don't cut my slice of the pie away.' My question is how we build the advocacy so we have the right people carrying the message of the university."

Michael Kesden, physics professor and Speaker of the Academic Senate, said that all he asks for from campus administration during this time is transparency and an effort to consult faculty for the big budgetary decisions that must be made once the dust settles around the flurry of recent executive actions.

Kesden said that for the time being, faculty and students are in the best position to advocate for the importance and continuity of their research to the general public.

DEBT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

their loan outpaced by the amount of interest they build up over time.

As of Feb. 20, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals extended and expanded an injunction to block the SAVE plan, as well as suggesting the program may be shut down in the near future. If the program is dismantled, borrowers would need to switch to one of the other payment plans, significantly increasing their monthly payments. The case comes as the result of a legal challenge piloted by several red states arguing the plan offers too much leniency, going beyond Congress' initial intent in authorizing income-dependent repayment plans. Since the preliminary injunction in August 2024, borrowers under SAVE have been placed in forbearance, meaning their loans are essentially frozen. During forbearance, expected to last throughout 2025, no interest accrues on the loan, but no payments can be made, meaning that the time spent in forbearance cannot count towards PSLF unless the borrower switches to another eligible plan, which could take months of processing time.

PSLF is also available to borrowers who graduated prior to the program's development. Michael Farmer, associate professor of Chinese history at UTD, completed his Ph.D. in 2001 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. By the conclusion of his academic career, he had taken out multiple loans which were consolidated into about $100,000 of debt under a 30-year repayment plan. According to Farmer, these monthly payments amounted to "the functional equivalent of a second mortgage." In 2010, under the newly developed PSLF program, he was able to earn credit for loan forgiveness by tracking ten years of repayment and qualified employment as a professor at UTD. In 2020, at the 10-year mark, he submitted his application for loan forgiveness and was rejected.

Prior to the Biden administration's expansion of the program, 99% of applicants to PSLF were denied. As of 2018, two out of three denials were lumped together under the generic header of "not meeting program requirements." This could mean their payment plan or initial loan was ineligible, but under the first Trump administration, applicants like Farmer were not made aware of the problem at the time of their denial.

"There was no explanation given other than 'Your application for loan forgiveness has been denied,' and phone calls got me nowhere," Farmer said. "No one could tell me why my application had been rejected ... We figured that was a lost cause, and we kept paying."

This silence from PSLF continued until October 2021, when the Department of Education released a statement announcing the program had been updated, encouraging previous applicants to reapply. At that point, Farmer was informed that his loan type had been discontinued, and he would have to reconsolidate his remaining balance into a direct consolidation loan. This would have been possible to complete in 2020, but under the DOE during the first Trump administration, Farmer and those in similar positions were not informed the loans they were actively documenting and paying off were technically ineligible for forgiveness.

The October 2021 reforms allowed Farmer to reapply for PSLF, placing his loan under forbearance for the processing period. In February, he was informed that his remaining loan balance of almost $70,000 was officially cleared. At that point, he had made active payments for 20 years and had paid over $150,000 on the initial $100,000 loan because of the accrued interest. Since 2007, federal student loan interest rates have hovered between 3-7% for undergraduates and 6-8% for graduate students, with the notable exception of 2020, when interest rates reached record lows. This means it is not uncommon for loans to nearly double in size by the end of a standard repayment period.

> "[Students need to] find ways of utilizing [their] skills and passions … in a way that's not going to have you teaching six classes a semester for $2,000 a class with no health insurance [at] four different community college campuses."
>
> — Michael Farmer

"I was not given the right information," Farmer said, regarding his choice to take out his student loans. "I made the best decisions I could based on the information I had … If I had known what the job market in the humanities was going to look like, I would not have taken out $100,000 worth of debt."

Looking forward, Farmer said current students considering a career in academia should make the availability of financial aid a priority.

"You get a fellowship, your university's investing in you, you get an assistantship, they're partially investing in you," Farmer said. "If they don't give you anything, they're just taking your money. I think that these days, this is how you have to look at it."

Corroborating this stance is Mai Wang, assistant professor of literature. Wang completed her undergraduate degree at Yale in 2010, an MFA at Boston University in 2015 and her second master's and Ph.D. at Stanford. Throughout this process, she was able to receive financial aid and competitive merit-based fellowships for the bulk of her educational financing. She graduated debt-free and began her professorial career at UTD without the weight of a student loan, which she partially attributes to the information she received as an undergraduate.

"I was an English major at Yale and they had at least one round table panel specifically for English majors seeking out academic careers," Wang said. "They also told us about the importance of going to a program … that is fully funded."

Wang, who currently runs a graduate course for master's and Ph.D. students in the literature program, said she feels her students are not being adequately prepared to make informed financial decisions regarding higher education because financial concerns and opportunities are not discussed openly. She noted that faculty mentorship at UTD is mostly oriented toward degree progression, and the university developing a workshop devoted to personal finances would be useful.

Both Farmer and Wang felt students should consider the question of graduate and doctoral work very carefully, pointing to uncertain prospects for higher education in the current economic climate. Currently, the applicant pool is much larger than job availability, and currently, programs are shrinking, not expanding. Additionally, House Republicans have floated policy proposals that would raise monthly student debt payments and limit PSLF eligibility. Wang recommends students avoid taking on debt entirely if possible.

"For any given academic position, there's easily 100, sometimes even as many as 300 qualified applicants," Wang said. "It's really important to stay out of debt throughout this whole process because at least if it doesn't work out, then you're not going to be also saddled with student loans."

Instead, Wang suggested students should look toward finding part-time work in related fields such as tutoring or consider seeking teacher certification to expand their options. To Farmer, this is especially true for students in the humanities.

"Your options as an undergraduate are pretty broad, but with the master's degree you've narrowed it down," Farmer said. "With a PhD, you've become even more specialized."

Although job prospects are not nonexistent, both Farmer and Wang emphasized the need for students to be realistic about their options by reaching out to professors in their interest areas and researching the availability of relevant positions, as well as the lifestyle those positions lead to. Wang recommended students look at the recent job placements of the graduates of any program they may be interested in, while Farmer warned against relying solely on teaching after graduation.

"[Students need to] find ways of utilizing [their] skills and passions … in a way that's not going to have you teaching six classes a semester for $2,000 a class with no health insurance [at] four different community college campuses," Farmer said.

MERCURY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

bylaws for each group. At the academic senate meeting, Martín introduced the policy establishing COSM as a step toward reforming *The Mercury*.

"The consensus was that this proposal was the best solution to get *The Mercury* up and running as quickly as possible," Martín said during the meeting.

The original text of S.R. 2024-02, which established the ad-hoc committee, resolved that committee should be formed to "review and rewrite the Student Media Bylaws to be in accordance with the best student journalism and media practices" in response to the original bylaws' ambiguity, which led to disagreements surrounding removal and appeal procedures and the ultimate dissolution of *The Mercury* after Student Affairs fired the entire Mercury management team Oct. 1.

The COSM proposal leaves the entire bylaw creation and revision process to its future appointees. Martín said to the Academic Senate that this shift from what Student Government originally intended — a direct revision of the bylaws themselves, rather than a plan to revise them in the future — would allow the university to establish a shared governance model to handle possible revisions.

"We quickly came to the conclusion that [revising the bylaws] was really beyond the scope of what we wanted to tackle," Martin said during the meeting.

Martín also doubled down on the notion that the Mercury management team voluntarily left their positions in fall 2024. Gene Fitch, vice president of Student Affairs, and Jenni Huffenberger, senior director of marketing and Student Affairs, said October 2024 that they believed the management team had quit after *The Mercury's* strike went into effect, despite students never stating they had stopped working for *The Mercury*.

"Subsequent to the removal of the Editor-in-Chief, the rest of the editorial staff of *The Mercury* resigned," Martín said. "And so we were left with no editorial staff to publish *The Mercury*."

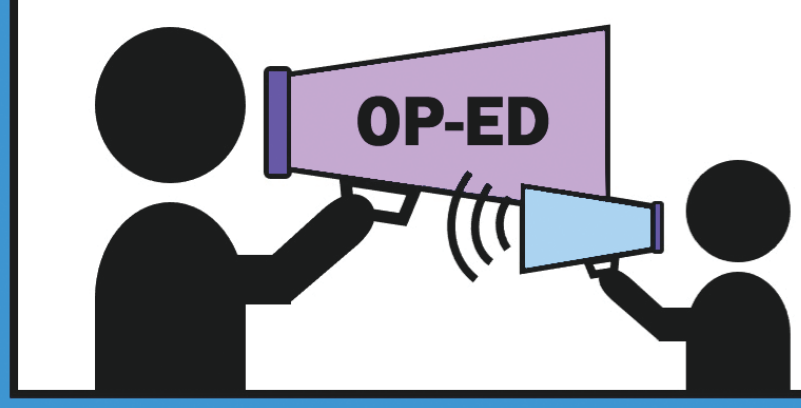
Following the mass firing of the Mercury's management team, Student Affairs also removed Lydia Lum, formerly the director of student media, from her position at the end of the fall semester.

Fitch told the Academic Senate that the university remained focused on reviving *The Mercury*.

"*The Mercury* is not *The Retrograde*," Fitch said. "*The Mercury* remains the official student newspaper publication at UTD. We are in the process of beginning to recruit students to fill the open leadership positions within *The Mercury*."

The Retrograde reached out to the Office of Communications for comment from Fitch regarding what the recruiting process would look like for a new Mercury leadership team. As of publication, Student Affairs has not responded. No details regarding the recruiting process are publicly available.

This is an ongoing story. Keep up with coverage of campus administrators trying to revive The Mercury at retrogradenews.com



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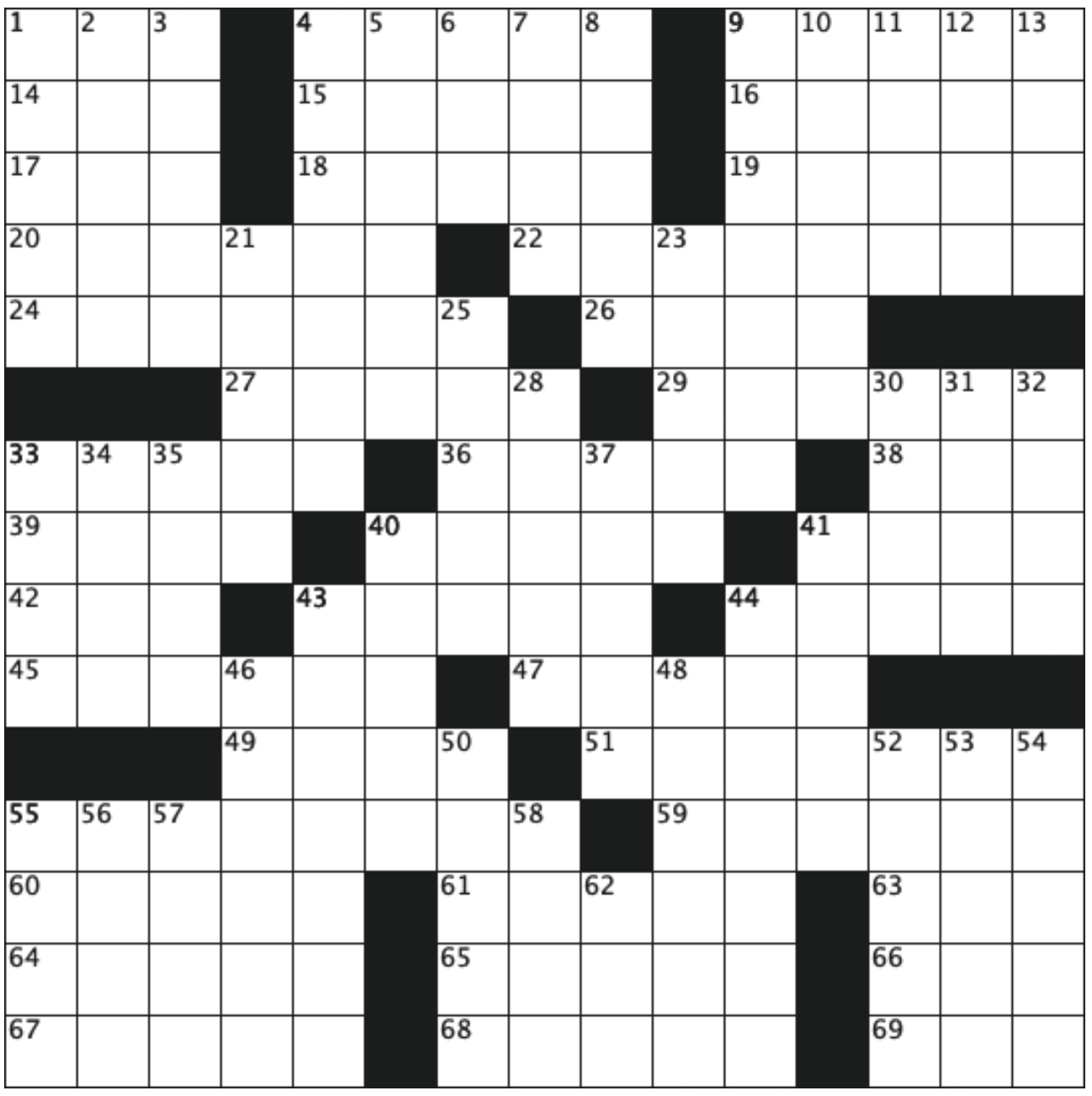
03/03 Crossword



ALANA PLATT | RETROGRADE STAFF

Across

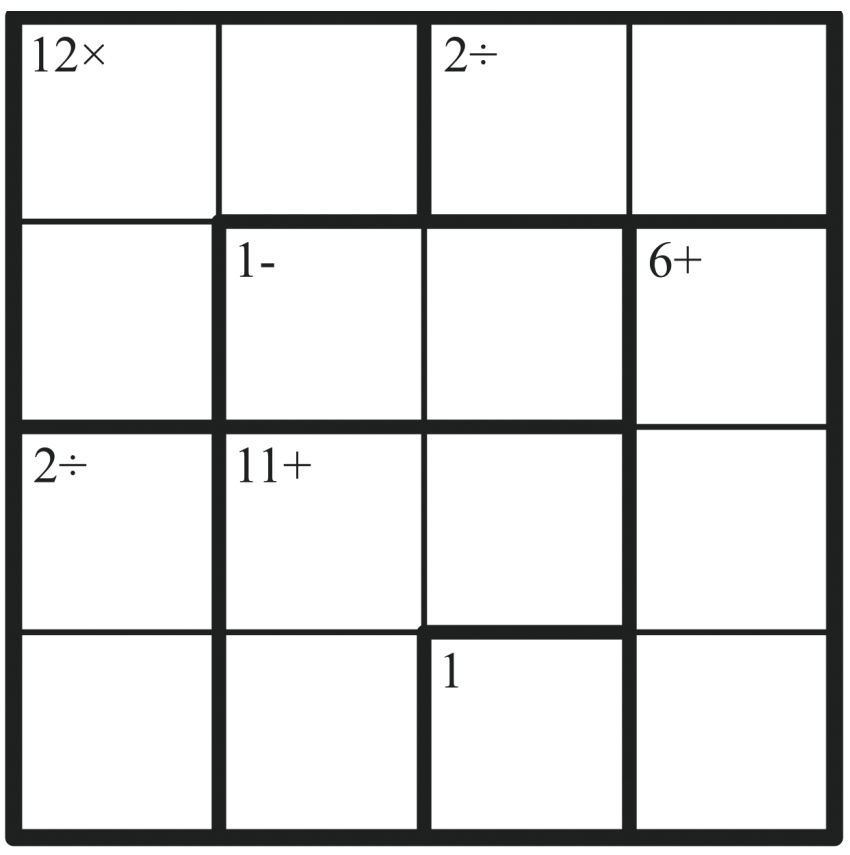
1 Small colleges
4 Occupied, as a desk
9 Homer epic
14 Works in a museum
15 One of the five senses
16 Drew of mystery novels
17 Neither here ___ there
18 Hawaiian hello
19 14 pounds, in Britain
20 ___ Johnson a.k.a. The Rock
22 Stole gas, as from a tank
24 Rings and things
26 "Yas queen ___!"
27 "The Tortoise and the Hare" writer
29 Clear as mud
33 Itsy-___
36 "Inferno" poet
38 Ashes holder
39 "You know it's not the same ___ was." (Harry Styles lyric)
40 One of the worst things to step on, according to the internet
41 Japanese soup
42 D.C. VIP
43 ___ Lama
44 Little bits
45 Decide one's had enough time outdoors
47 "Bye Bye Bye" boy band
49 Inquires
51 Amelia who went missing in the middle of Pacific Ocean
55 They have a point
59 Subtle difference
60 Saudi neighbor
61 Japanese mushroom
63 Text-scanning technology, briefly
64 Basic ideas
65 Crafted, as a basket
66 Beaver's creation
67 Doesn't leave
68 Pigs' digs
69 Hosp. areas

Down

1 Band-Aid co.
2 Russell of "Gladiator"
3 Proverbial backbreaker
4 ___ cup (trendy beverage holder)
5 Many IM recipients
6 Yours, in Italy
7 German interjections
8 Bangkok residents
9 Fit
10 Sister of Michael and Janet Jackson
11 Knowing, as a secret
12 Skin breakout
13 Like blue hair
21 You may get a rise out of it
23 Schemes
25 Peak performance?
28 Heathen
30 Admit defeat
31 Word before "major" or "minor"
32 Son of Seth
33 Big party
34 "That makes sense"
35 Singer Turner
37 Sound
40 Sri ___
41 Starbucks flavor
43 Brush aside
44 State of many ancient Roman cities
46 Delicate
48 "___ Doodle"
50 Oodles
52 One end of a battery
53 Drivable toy, for short
54 Stints in prison or in office
55 Feet, in slang
56 Give off
57 Spanish house
58 ___-nosed kid
62 Egg: Prefix

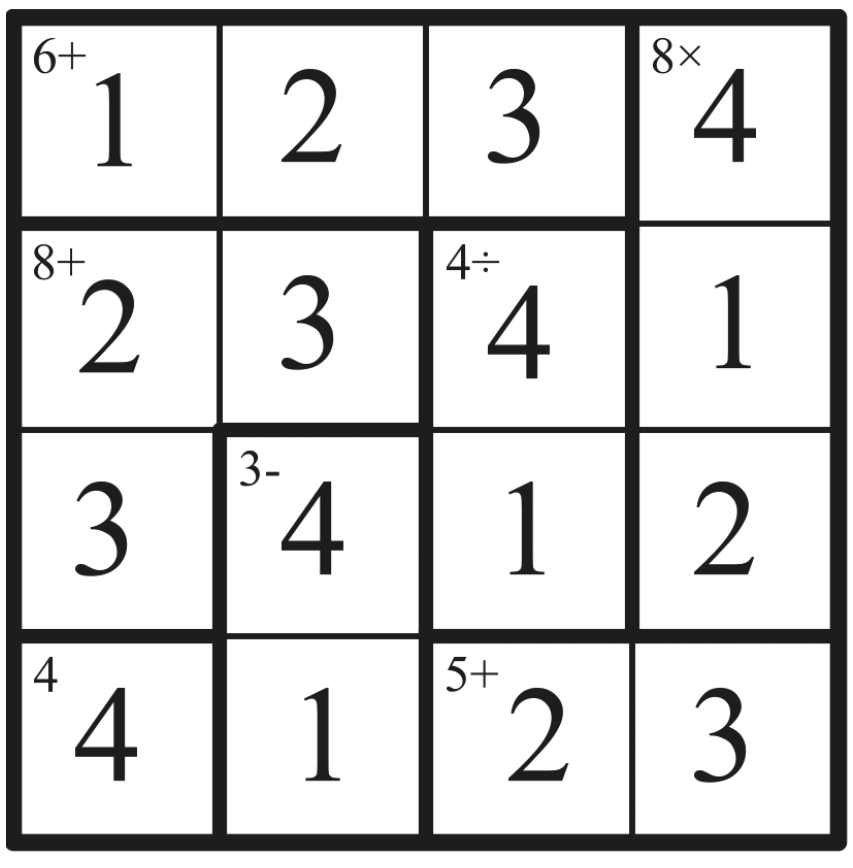
03/03 KenKen

Instructions: Your goal is to fill up the 4×4 grid with numbers 1-4. Each column and row must have exactly one of each number, just like in sudoku. Each box (an area outlined with thick black lines) has a target number and a mathematical operation listed in the top-left corner. The numbers within the box must result in the target number when the mathematical operation is employed. For example, a box with 3+ could be satisfied with 1 and 2, as 1+2=3. Similarly, a box with 2÷ could be satisfied with either (1,2) or (2,4), as 2÷1=2 and 4÷2=2. Visit our website for a full walkthrough.



RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Example of a complete KenKen:



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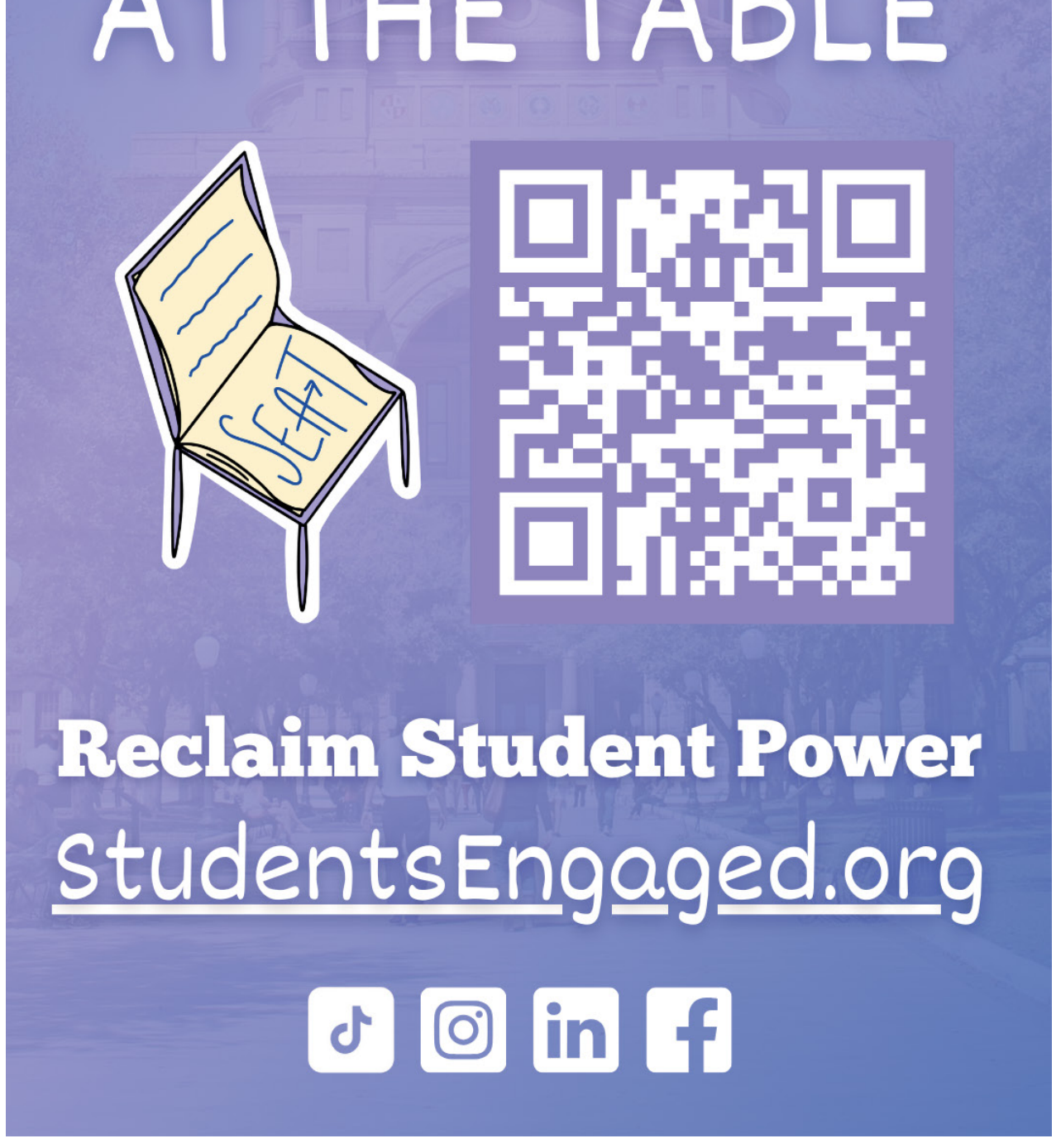


A hidden gem of preservation at UTD: the History of Aviation Archives

The archives teach visitors about flight over the years — as well as war, commerce, journalism, women's work and more

NANDINI SINGH
Life & Arts Editor

PHOTOS BY **SHREYA RAVI** | RETROGRADE STAFF

Hidden away in a corner of SPN2 is one of UTD's largest, yet little-known, historical preservation projects. With artifacts ranging from the personal desk of General Aviator Jimmy Doolittle, the man responsible for U.S.'s Doolittle raid on Japan during World War II, to a memorial plaque preserving the names of fallen and missing U.S. air transport workers, the room holds aviation's rich history. This is the History of Aviation Archives, a place where the history of flight is kept grounded at UTD.

The archives fall under UTD's Special Collections Division, which preserves art and research like rare books or university archives that tell of UTD's past. Serving as the largest section within the divisions, the History of Aviation Archives house news clippings, photographs, and other sources from around the globe related to aeronautics. Groupings like the Chance Vought collection, which focuses on carrier-based air travel, to the Twirly Bird collection of helicopters, fill the space with airfare's diverse, complex history. Patrizia Nava, senior curator of the archives, said that the archives aren't limited to an engineering focus.

"The crux about aviation archives is that [people] think it's about mechanics and aeronautics, but aviation is so much more," Nava said. "It is women in aviation, it is journalism and how it is reported, what role does aviation play in history."

The field of aviation first saw significant advancement in World War I, where airplanes were categorized as military planes, pursuit airplanes, bombers and more. Commercial flight, such as airmail and civilian transport, developed afterward on the foundation of military technology. In the present day, the aviation industry focuses on developing drones for various purposes, ranging from military use to civil projects like observing wildlife unobtrusively from a bird's-eye view. According to Nava, all of this recorded history touches upon only a minute aspect of aviation's expansive reach.

"I was watching a German documentary about the Frankfurt Airport in Germany, and I did not [realize] how many professions [worked] at this airport," Nava said. "It's [many] things, [like] how do you nourish these people? Our challenge should be to ask so many more questions about these topics."

Nava's exploration into archival work began with her passion for history and wanting to know why things are the way things are.

"It's like beautiful detective work," Nava said. "It gave me the opportunity to get personally in touch with people I don't know, I've never met, but they [spoke] in their letters and their diaries about their personal experiences and it's fascinating to see and read."

Through learning about aviation, Nava said her knowledge about histories and cultures that went beyond her schooling flourished. An example that stands out to her is the Hmong people's role in the Vietnam War. The Hmong people aided in reducing the growth of communism in North Vietnam as well as assisting American air force pilots and soldiers in both combat and rescuing the injured. In the present day, many Hmong currently reside in Minnesota after immigrating to the U.S. Nava found that aviation has the potential to open gateways that may not be seen at first glance, such as the storied history of women pilots and engineers.

"[These] were adventurous women who did something and succeeded in that," Nava said. "It is inspiring, and there are [many] programs that encourage young girls to get into aviation in all aspects, whether it is space flight or the military [and] commercial side. Young girls are encouraged through the STEM programs, and not just reduced to humanities and languages."

As time continues to pass and the profession seeks archivists to continue preserving these stories, one factor will keep such history alive, according to Nava: enthusiasm from future generations.

"I did not know anything about aviation, and I am not an aeronautical engineer," Nava said. "You have to have the enthusiasm for it, and not to shy away from a topic that you do not know anything about and think this is a challenge to grow [within]."

Across the world, museums are treated as accessible and educational to a lay audience, while archives are seen as secluded and focused on academia. According to Nava, archives hold the same importance as museums and should be seen as valuable places worth visiting.

"People shy away and think it's this dusty [place], which in fact we are not," Nava said. "It is upon us to educate the students, the faculty and the general public alike how to access our materials and what we have."

The archives' space in SPN2 includes the archive room, which is a controlled environment to safely maintain the various records and collections. Ellen Safley, dean of the McDermott Library, said the aviation archives are also available online in the library's collection.

"We believe that digital material will make it easy for students to find," Safley said. "If you are in Australia, you might find something in one of these guides that may make you come to UTD."

The archives are located in Synergy Park North 2 (SPN2 11.206) and are open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. The space welcomes students, faculty and the public, and it is recommended that the purpose of the visit is notified to Patrizia Nava through email prior, so she may aid the visitors. The space includes a reading room, which allows visitors to access the collections of boxes and folders upon request and is otherwise a place for quiet study and reflection that will be available for UTD students to reserve online in the future.

"It is our daily lives," Nava said. "Aviation is so much [a part] of our daily lives whether we fly on vacation, [go to] conferences, [receive] airmail or packages, aviation is everywhere."

'Karen Springs' brings a chaotic reflection of American politics to the UTD stage

The play asks its audience to grapple with their beliefs and responses to difference in an increasingly polarized world

SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

Props featured in "Karen Springs" explicIty referenced current-day slogans, movements and events.

TYLER CRIVELLA
Staff Writer

Amid a politically charged atmosphere, UTD Theatre's timely performance of "Karen Springs" ineffectively juggles modern debates over governance with a modest dose of absurdist comedy.

Director and writer Maiza Hixson, currently a visiting assistant professor at UTD, created "Karen Springs" as an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's 1882 classic play "An Enemy of the People," placing the original's political themes of truth-seeking and competing interests into a contemporary lens. The play tells the story of a doctor who discovers a deadly bacterial infection within the eponymous Karen Springs and how he desperately tries to inform an increasingly hostile populace. Opening night for "Karen Springs" was Feb. 24 and its final showing took place March 1.

The piece is the result of a thorough creative process, in which Hixson drew on personal experiences to comment on modern political discourse. A daughter to a water-based environmental advocate herself, Hixson broached a conversation regarding governmental action grounded in solutions.

"It seeks to create more dialogue than discourse or polarization," Hixson said. "I think that the play gives people the tools they need to understand people's motivations."

The performance draws stark parallels to real-world water contamination issues, such as those Texas faces. State water systems have failed to reach EPA guidelines concerning forever chemicals with dozens of towns exceeding new federal limits, while Johnson County, just one hour south of UTD, is facing an official state of disaster because of water contamination. Hixson used these events as inspiration to address the people behind such threats.

The play takes a more indirect approach to addressing these issues by criticizing real-world actors as egotistical and incorrect in their own unique ways through its cast of characters. Environmental activist Dr. Richards carries a disregard for economic interests; the town's patriarch Karen underscores a lack of long-term concern; and its mayor disregards any democratic interests of the town. The show forces audiences to reckon with their own preconceived notions over political ideology, making the audience unexpected participants in the performance's debates.

The cast consists of, but is not limited to, an ultra-vegan doctor, a money-hungry cattle killer, social media influencers, a consistently outraged wife, a mob of upset citizens and the anti-marijuana "Please Say No" Society. By using this diverse array of political ideologies, the show demonstrates how all forms of political life are slightly flawed.

In reference to his role as Dr. Richards, ATEC junior Kyle Hurst emphasized the character's desire to make a difference, believing that public opinion in Karen Springs would be on his side. VPAS senior Lillian Eakle, who plays wife Allie Richards, has a slightly different stance.

"He's saying, 'We have to shut the spas down,' but he goes about it in a way that is very extreme and hurts everybody in the process," Eakle said. "What would be the correct thing to do in this situation?"

Unfortunately, the show struggles to effectively present the interesting theoretical discussions in the script on the stage.

Read the rest of this article online at retrogradenews.com.

SURJADITYA SARKAR | RETROGRADE STAFF

Culture Carnival brings UTD students together to celebrate different cultures

Interactive games show off different traditions and customs

PAULA NJUMBE
Staff Writer

The Graduate Student Assembly and Intercultural Programs jointly hosted the Culture Carnival Feb. 19 to celebrate the boundless cultural groups present at UTD. The event teemed with students from different backgrounds enjoying festive games that tested their knowledge of different languages, cultural riddles, famous cultural landmarks and more. The cheerful environment encouraged students to interact and exchange information about each other's cultures and traditions while dining on food from around the globe.

Culture Carnival was a part of UTD's annual iWeek celebration, a week of programs and events that feature international cultures through food, music, performances and activities. Held only for the second time this year, Culture Carnival is a new addition to iWeek's lineup and quickly won over attendees with its various attractions — among them food.

Pub tables arranged around the room held countless food items such as samosas, chai and spring rolls — all delicacies from different South and Southeast Asian cultures.

"I think such an event is important because we get to meet people from other cultures and we get to know about their culture," Preeti Vasaikar, a computer science graduate student attending the event, said. "I learned about Malaysian [culture], I learned about their food."

Vasaikar said her favorite game at the event was icebreaker bingo: the cards required students to ask each other questions that involved culture. Some example cards were "Ask someone what their name means in their language" and "Find someone who speaks three or more languages."

Another game played at the event was GeoGuessr, where random sounds were played on a speaker and attendees had to guess which country those sounds came from. They received points for answering the correct country and bonus points for guessing the correct sound. Priya Samil, information tech and management graduate, said the game was one of her favorite parts of the event.

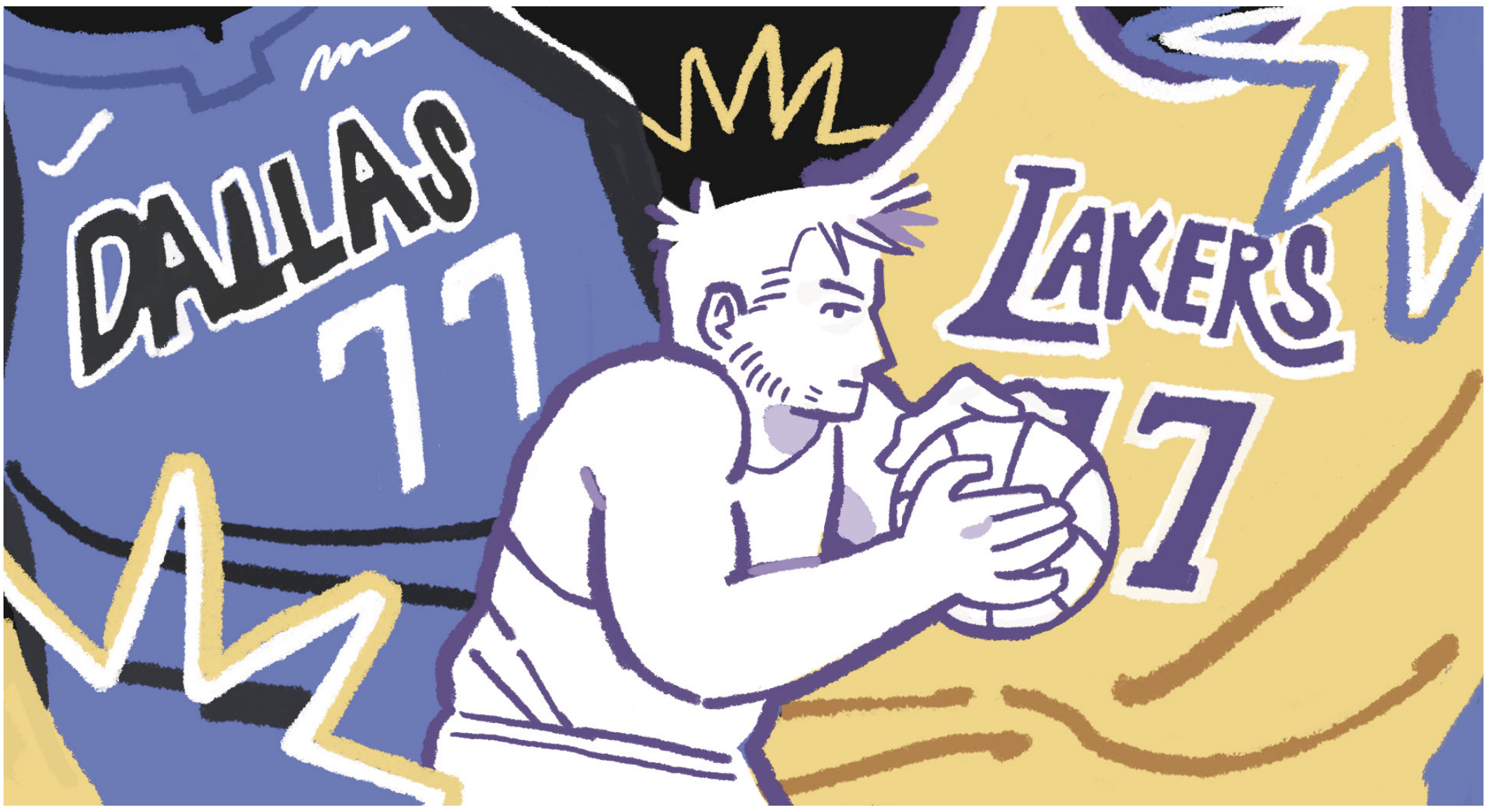
Vishva Patel, a cybersecurity, technology and policy graduate and president of GSA, said he felt passionate about creating an event like Culture Carnival because it allows different people to share their communities with one another.

"We [GSA] try to bring more cultures together," Patel said. "We try to do fun events for them like a fashion show, doing events where they represent their culture, they sing songs from their cultures, they teach people about their dressing styles and everything."

Patel said Culture Carnival was a way to introduce students to new practices and spread awareness about underrepresented cultures, so students from those lesser-known communities can feel more welcome at UTD. By pushing students to engage in interactive activities, they get to experience different parts of the world and new customs, traditions, languages and foods.

GSA will continue organizing events like Culture Carnival in the future and hopes to collaborate with some of the cultural groups at UTD, according to Patel. Attendees like Vasaikar said they were eager for more events like it in the future.

"The best part is students showing up with different expectations," Patel said. "Once they come to know about the different games that we can make them play, it's fun for them and seeing their happiness is something that brings me joy."



AASHIKA KISHORE | RETROGRADE STAFF

HOW TO BETRAY A FANBASE: THE LUKA DONCIC SAGA

The Mavericks will remain a good team after the Dončić trade — at the cost of destroying their reputation and fanbase

KRISH GANDHI
Staff Writer

On June 21, 2018, the Dallas Mavericks traded for the draft rights of Luka Dončić, a 19-year-old from Slovenia. The timing couldn't have been more perfect. Franchise cornerstone Dirk Nowtizki was going into his final season, and the idea that the Mavericks could seamlessly transition from franchise player to franchise player excited the city of Dallas. It should have been a move that brought Dallas glory over the next decade plus.

Dončić somehow surpassed the lofty expectations put onto his shoulders. He won the NBA's Rookie of the Year award, and in his next five seasons, was selected to the NBA All-Star team and 1st Team All-NBA each time. In 2024, Dončić led the entire league in scoring and was a MVP finalist as the Mavericks silenced doubters en route to the NBA Finals, where they would ultimately come short against the Boston Celtics. It was clear that we were witnessing a generational talent, and he belonged to Dallas.

On Feb. 11, ESPN's NBA insider Shams Charania reported that Dončić had been traded to the Los Angeles Lakers in exchange for star big-man Anthony Davis, Max Christie and a 2029 first-round pick. When I first saw the trade, I was convinced that Charania's social media accounts were hacked and this was fake; however, as others confirmed the trade, it was clear that Dallas sports fans' worst nightmare was a reality: Dončić was no longer a Maverick.

This trade is arguably the most shocking event in sports history. The Lakers, the biggest brand in the NBA, were gifted a 25-year-old generational talent, essentially guaranteeing the team being serious contenders for the next decade. For the Mavericks, it is one of the biggest blunders in sports history and a betrayal to the city of Dallas. The trade is terrible not only from a basketball perspective but also destroys the Mavericks' reputation in the league and betrays their fanbase.

The problem on the court

Immediately following news of the trade, Mavericks general manager Nico Harrison claimed that the trade gave the Mavericks a better chance to win a championship now, expressing that "defense wins championships."

First of all, let's reestablish the fact that the Dallas Mavericks were in the NBA Finals not even 8 months before this trade while having Dončić as their best player! This was no fluke, as 2 years prior they made the Western Conference Finals. It is baffling to even consider that trading a 25-year-old superstar, who is entering his prime and has already led you to multiple deep playoff runs, for another star, who is a worse overall player, is a win-now move.

To be fair, Dončić is an inconsistent defender and Davis is a much better defender overall. But the Mavericks should not be worrying about defense. After the 2024 trade deadline, the Mavericks had the fourth-best defensive rating while Dončić was playing well over 30 minutes a game. In those 2024 finals, the opinion held by many, including ESPN analyst Brian Windhorst, is that they lost because the Boston Celtics continuously attacked Dončić on defense. In reality, the Celtics' offense had their worst performance of the playoffs by far. After having a record-setting offensive rating (points per 100 possessions) of 123.2 during the season, the Celtics did not dominate offensively, with four out of the five games being well under their normal output. The Mavericks lost that series because they were terrible offensively, especially when it came to shooting threes (31.6%). They were held to under 100 points in four out of the five contests, an embarrassing outing in the modern NBA. This was an issue that Mavericks addressed in the offseason by adding players like Klay Thompson, but that no longer matters.

Even if the Mavericks become a defensive nightmare for opposing teams, they have now lost arguably the best playmaker in the NBA. They've lost a player who hit threes at a solid clip on high volume and generated the most open threes in the NBA, extremely valuable in a league that has essentially become a "who can make the most threes" contest. While Kyrie Irving is a great player, he has not shown in his 14-year career that he can be the best playmaker on a contender. Below Irving on the depth chart are players I would certainly not trust to lead an offense.

The Mavericks will likely be a really good team in the short-term. They have good players and decent depth. Davis is an amazing player who will certainly have his great moments in Dallas, and it's sad that he may never be fully embraced by the city. But at the end of the day, they will never know where they could have gone with Dončić.

> "Davis is an amazing player who will certainly have his great moments in Dallas, and it's sad that he may never be fully embraced by the city. But at the end of the day, they will never know where they could have gone with Dončić."

A damaged reputation

In the days following the trade, more details were released regarding Harrison's process and motivations. Harrison was the one who called Lakers general manager Rob Pelinka, meaning the Mavericks were actively trying to get rid of Dončić. In Dončić's introductory press conference, Pelinka essentially said that Harrison wanted this process to remain secret, and that the Lakers kept their word.

It is extremely odd that Harrison did not let the entire NBA know that Dončić was on the market. It would have generated the most intense bidding war in NBA history. According to ESPN insider Tim MacMahon, executives around the league are furious they did not have the opportunity to outbid the Lakers for Dončić. Teams like the Oklahoma City Thunder, San Antonio Spurs and Utah Jazz have been stockpiling draft picks in the hope that a player of this caliber becomes available. The secretive trade was a horrible process that executives around the league will remember when it comes to future trades.

And it's not just executives who will view the Mavericks unfavorably after this move. NBA correspondent Marc Stein reported that Dončić did not want to leave Dallas at all and was completely blindsided by the move. This has been a trend in recent years for the Mavericks, with players like Grant Williams and Seth Curry traded to bottom feeders less than a year into their contracts in 2024. Dončić was eligible for a 5 year, $346 million supermax contract extension in the offseason because of his five consecutive First Team All-NBA selections, which he gave "absolutely" zero indication he would not sign in the upcoming offseason. By trading Dončić away, the Mavericks took away his eligibility for the supermax, costing him well over $100 million. Dončić will not be struggling with $200 million, but players around the league will take note of the fact that the Mavericks have zero sense of loyalty and will mess with your livelihood without thinking twice.

On top of all of this, the team went out of their way to discredit Dončić, leaking that his weight ballooned to over 270 pounds — while rehabbing from an injury — and that he only "fit the culture" but didn't "add to the culture," whatever that means. During an interview with *Dallas Morning News*' Brad Townsend, Mavericks governor Patrick Dumont essentially said that Dončić was not a hard worker and used players like Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird and Shaquile O'Neal as an example of the types of people the Mavericks want in their organization. This sounds like someone who just Googled "best basketball players of all time." Not to mention using Shaq, the same player who Kobe Bryant said would've had 12 rings if he ever worked hard, as an example of "hard work" is embarrassing. The blatant disrespect given to the Mavericks' franchise cornerstone of six years is pathetic.

A betrayal to the city of Dallas

Dirk Nowitzki played 21 seasons in the NBA, all of them with the Mavericks. The city was there for his lows and highs and were rewarded with an NBA championship in 2011. Outside of the Mavericks' home arena, there is a statue of Nowitzki shooting his iconic one-legged fadeaway with the inscription "Loyalty Never Fades Away."

Trading a 25-year-old superstar who did not want to leave is not loyalty. Blindsiding a player who led you to the NBA Finals while battling all sorts of injuries is not loyalty. Trying to make a player who has never had a negative word said about him by a teammate appear as a lazy team cancer is not loyalty. Slandering a player who has never made a negative statement about the franchise in seven years despite being surrounded with lackluster rosters for multiple seasons is not loyalty. What exactly does loyalty mean to the Dallas Mavericks?

Nowitzki was not in the building for the debut of Davis in a Mavericks jersey on Feb. 8. Instead, he traveled all the way to Los Angeles to witness the debut of Dončić as a Laker on Feb. 10. That is a statement stronger than anything I or anyone else can write.

Dončić is the reason I started watching basketball. As someone who exclusively watched football for the first 15 years of my life, Dončić and the Mavericks gave me the first real playoff success in my life. The Mavericks being good encouraged me to become interested in the other sports around DFW like baseball and hockey. In a city located in football-loving Texas and home to the Dallas Cowboys, the biggest brand in American sports, it was somehow a Slovenia-born basketball player who was the face of the city. And it was ripped away for no good reason.

Letter to the Editor

CASSIDY CHUNG
Courtesy

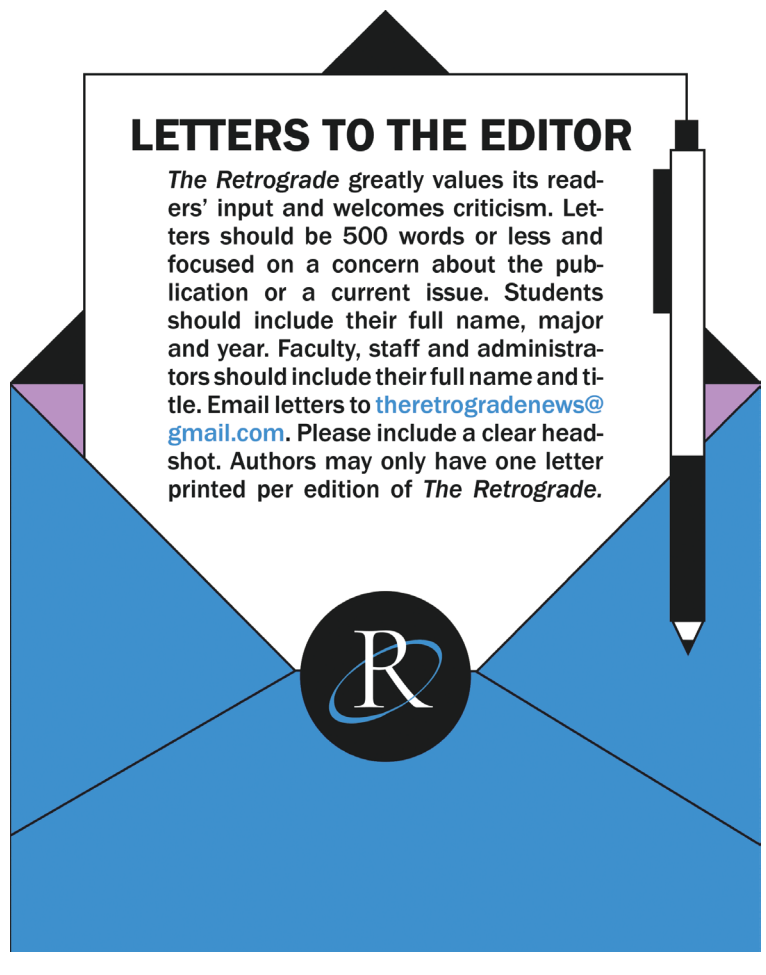
> "As a college student working to make the world a more livable place, the current state of climate policy is alarming."

The positive effects of renewable energy are undeniable – they allow us to channel solar and wind as a better alternative to the expensive costs of utilizing electricity. As such, Donald Trump's stance towards anti-wind policies is detrimental for the advancement of clean air and energy in the country as a whole. Trump's vision of a continued reliance on fossil fuel usage clearly does not align with what renewable energy advocates wish to push for.

Unfortunately, the president's Jan. 20 executive order that would block renewable energy building is accompanied by a bill that would impose similar restrictions in Texas called SB 819. This is a bill that would also place unfair environmental fees on any wind or solar projects. As a result, fossil fuels would take center stage since they would not have to face these new costs. Another setback under SB 819 would be the additional restrictive conditions for renewable energy. These new conditions demand that wind turbines need to be placed at a distance of 3,000 feet from property lines. On the other hand, the far more damaging oil and gas wells only need to stay 467 feet from those property lines.

As a college student working to make the world a more livable place, the current state of climate policy is alarming. We need to eliminate factors that restrict our pathways to renewable energy in order to make a positive impact. Renewable energy is the future, and I urge people to take immediate action.

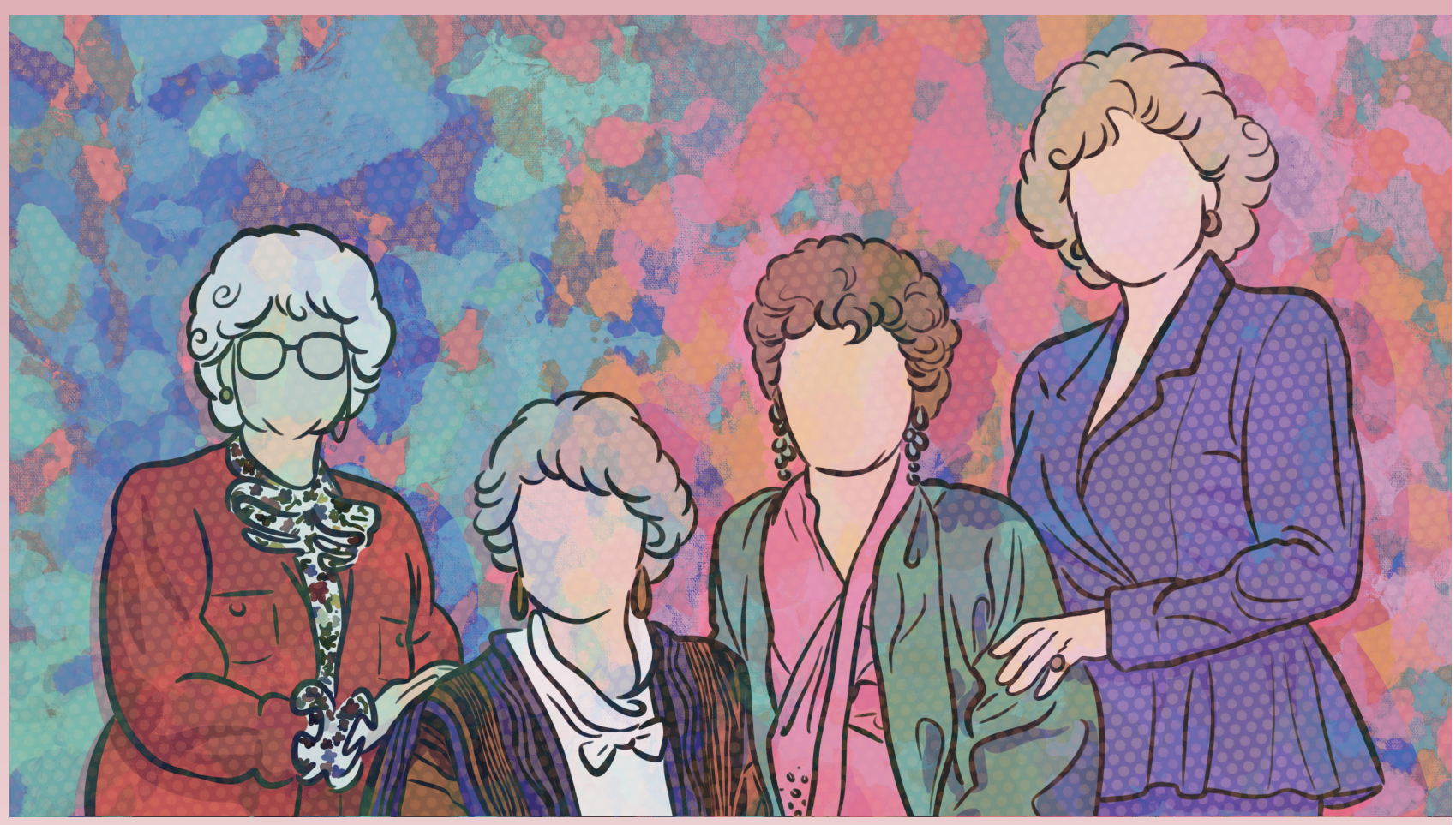
Cassidy Chung
UTD Student



'Golden Girls': the perfect sitcom for joyful nights

The show is a delightful look into the lives of four older women, masterfully balancing comedy with pointed political commentary

ASHNA KARIA
Staff Writer



ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

The first episode of "Golden Girls" aired in 1985, opening to rave reviews. Almost 40 years later, brand-new watchers like me are still getting in on the hype. I started watching the show just a few months ago, and I couldn't be happier about it. While I have a noted affinity for older media, it's not just my bias talking when I give this show its flowers. After a flurry of assignments, applications, emails and texts, I take little pleasure in watching the newest Netflix original series with hourlong episodes and characters who refuse to speak to each other, all for a 4-episode season that ends on a cliffhanger and never gets renewed. Instead, I find my peace through "Golden Girls," a show where I know that no matter what happens, the girls have it handled it in 30 minutes or less. If that sounds like something you need, try out this incredibly comforting show that manages to tackle hard questions with sensitivity, candor and midnight snacks.

"Golden Girls" follows four women, all in their "golden years," living together in a house in Miami. There's Dorothy Zbornak, sensible, strong-willed, and more than a little sarcastic; her mother Sophia Petrillo; the sweet but naive Rose Nylund; and Blanche Devereaux, a southern belle with a taste for lawyers, doctors and any other man who offers to pay for dinner. Together, they face life's ups and downs and talk through their problems over 3 a.m. cheesecake.

From the start, the show had a groundbreaking premise. Not a single main character was under 55 — despite what Blanche likes to tell people — and even now it's difficult to imagine a mainstream network that would greenlight a show revolving entirely around four older women. The show was founded on the idea that life doesn't stop after you turn 30, 40 or in Sophia's case, 85. Each of the girls leads a full life — they are involved in their communities, go to work, and go on dates. The show makes a point to openly talk about this part of their lives, discussing female sexuality with candor that can be hard to find even in modern TV series. The girls often turn their midnight talks into a story hour, sharing tidbits about their latest dates, first times and more than one acknowledgement that even though their bodies have changed, life is still worth enjoying. It's startling, refreshing and comforting to watch. None of us can escape the passage of time, and especially for women, it often feels like we melt into the background as we grow older. "Golden Girls" challenges that.

Female actors often go through the struggle of aging while in the public eye. Once they hit a certain age, they are supposed to either disappear from screen or find another niche to pivot into — frequently turning toward drama rather than comedy. Female-led comedies exist, like "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" or "30 Rock," but they all revolve around younger women. It's difficult to find media featuring middle-aged women who are allowed to make jokes rather than having jokes told at their expense, like one so often sees in the stereotypical "sitcom mom," who is either still young and attractive – like Claire from "Modern Family" — or a nagging housewife — see: "Everybody Hates Chris," "That 70's Show," "Malcom in the Middle" and more.

"Golden Girls" challenges those tropes with a cast of women who, for all their campy misadventures, feel blessedly real. These are women who have entered a new phase of life: their kids have moved out, they are either divorced or widowed and they are starting to feel like it's too late to start over. Within the first season, we see them discuss ageism in the workplace as Rose struggles to find a new job, fearing that at her age, no one wants her around anymore. Yet the girls don't let her drown in self-pity, reminding her it doesn't matter if the world is asking her to retreat, they want her around — and if they are growing old, they're doing it together. It's funny, heartfelt, and rings of truth in a way that would become the show's signature style as it tackled contemporary problems, striking a delicate balance between realistic responses and radical commentary.

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Throughout the show's run, it covered opioid addiction, teen pregnancy, interracial relationships, homelessness, poverty, immigration, same-sex marriage and more — each topic handled with a refreshing amount of care. For example, in an episode that aired in 1990, Rose finds out she may be carrying HIV because of a blood transfusion. The show depicts Rose struggling with the news without judgment without taking the easy route by emphasizing her "blamelessness." The episode explicitly dismantles the stigma surrounding AIDS at a moment during the epidemic when it was still considered a "gay men's" disease.

When Rose snaps, suggesting this wasn't supposed to happen to her because she makes good choices, Blanche responds that "AIDS is not a bad person's disease, it is not God punishing people for their sins," pushed even further when Blanche and Dorothy confront Sophia for avoiding Rose. Their discussion points out how the stigma around AIDS made it harder for those afflicted to receive support, ending with an agreement that the three of them will support Rose no matter what her results show. Even for a show as liberal as this one, I was surprised that commentary this radical was allowed, even encouraged, in 1990. Modern shows that tackle heavier themes like "Euphoria" or "Pose" tend to lean darker in tone, catering to a more targeted audience, making "Golden Girls" a unique and refreshing blend of commentary and comedy.

Even when the plots don't revolve around a politically relevant issue, the show is still impactful, as if it knows there is some secret, quiet fear in the hearts of its viewers that will be soothed by simple acknowledgement. There are times when the girls feel worn-out, like the world is moving on without them as they grow older, and yet they keep going. They try new business ventures, pick up hobbies, go dancing, volunteer and talk it out with their best friends. They have fulfilling, mutually supportive close friendships and the warmth between them feels real. Even when they fight, they make up because nothing is ever bad enough to lose your best friend over. Their stories show that not all problems can be solved in one day, but that doesn't make them unsolvable — a sentiment that rings true in my own life. Whether I'm spinning out over school, work or my personal life, I can put on an episode, slow down for half an hour, and come out of it feeling like nothing worth keeping is really unsalvageable. If that sounds like something you want, or if you just need a friend, try putting on an episode of "Golden Girls" — you might be here for a while.

Halal Shack's price-gouged hummus stabs students in the back

The student meal plan's usefulness deteriorates further as arbitrary limitations ruin the iconic Halal Shack rice bowl

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

YIYI DING | RETROGRADE STAFF

Long ago, I used to love Halal Shack. It easily stood out as the most nutritious and customizable meal exchange option on campus, but that love was shattered when the menu withered away.

The price gouging has been a slow roll-out process throughout fall 2024 and spring 2025. Halal Shack marked up the crispy chicken, forcing customers to pay $2 more for it. The price hike made it impossible to get with the meal exchange and felt entirely arbitrary when the regular grilled chicken had no extra fees. How is the breading and frying process so costly? Are they dipping the chicken into a vat of gold? We are already spending thousands of dollars to have a meal plan, and UTD Dining can't afford to let us eat crispy chicken. Strange.

Then they came for the hummus. Only two places on campus offer hummus — and one of those places is Dining Hall West, so we can say that really, only one place on campus offers hummus. I personally am not interested in risking food poisoning by eating the beige mush that the dining hall calls hummus. If I want a small scoop of hummus with a rice bowl, I now have to pay an extra $0.99 which means I can't get it as part of the meal exchange. Ten ounces of hummus at Walmart typically costs $3 for regular hummus and about $4 for organic or special varieties of it. Getting three scoops of hummus costs $3 and barely amounts to four ounces of hummus if the server is generous. I can't imagine how slim the margins must be for UTD Dining if they feel obligated to charge us an extra dollar for the idea of hummus.

And perhaps worst of all is the change to the cheese offerings. As a college student, I never even considered the feta cheese option since such luxuries are beyond my comprehension, but even the mozzarella cheese eludes me now with the additional $0.99 fee. At that point, I am just being extorted if I ask for anything beyond rice and lettuce in my bowl.

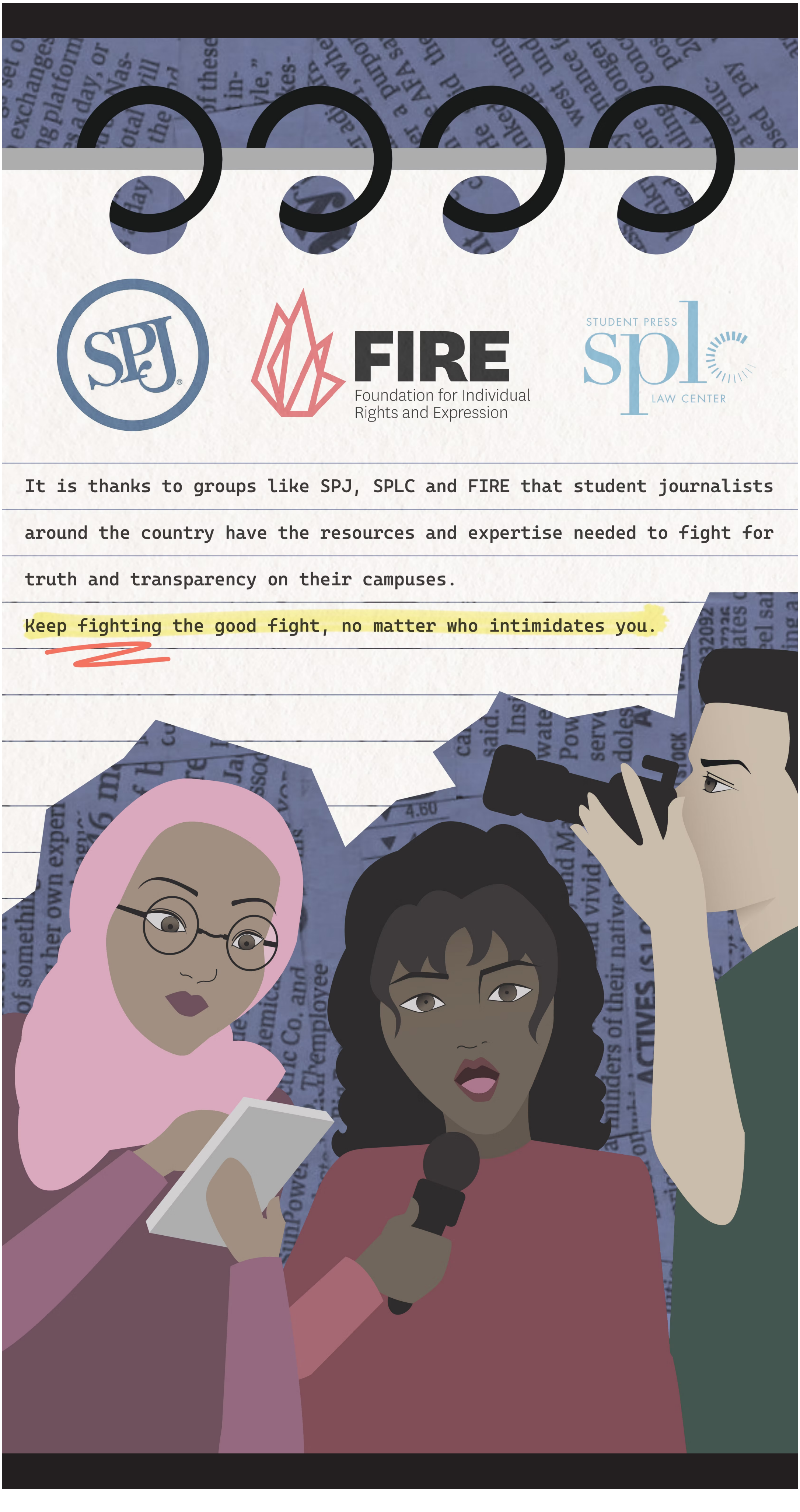
The cheapest weekly meal plan option costs $2,219.10 and lets you eat on campus 10 times a week, five of which may be used for meal exchange. Taking half of that cost and spreading it out across the sixteen-week semester gives us a grand total of $69.35 to be spent on meal exchanges each week, or about $14 per meal. The traditional toppings that Halal Shack used to offer as part of the meal — which continue to be offered at Halal Shacks at other universities — simply aren't included in the UTD plan anymore. The $14 price places Halal Shack's meal exchange option almost at the exact price point they offer their non-meal exchange options at, and that doesn't include traditional toppings like cheese or hummus. Nor does it consider whatever contracts UTD might have behind the scenes with Chartwells Higher Education, which oversees all dining locations on campus.

Chartwells is well-known for its near constant controversies. Chartwells and its parent company, Compass Group, have tried to bribe United Nations officials, given the prisoners they service listeria, paid millions in settlements to brush aside scandals and consistently served moldy and substandard meals to its university clients. For a catering conglomerate, Compass Group is in far too many scandals to mention all of them in just this article. Chartwells and its parent company somehow finds the funds to pay out multi-million-dollar settlements on the regular, but they can't even provide us with hummus or cheese. The cherry on top is that UTD's contract with Chartwells has never been made public. Who knows what secret schemes were cooked up between President Richard Benson and the Compass Group — perhaps price hiking hummus and cheese is part of a multi-stage plan to silence dissent on campus by keeping students sad and malnourished.

Thousands of students at UTD are required to buy meal plans to even live on campus, and UTD is failing them by letting Chartwells lower the quality of its options. We continue losing meal exchange options, as seen by the recent loss of The Pub and Smoothie King, and in their place we have only seen locations that don't accept meal exchanges, like TeaCo and Buffalo Wild Wings, pop up.

UTD should give us more meal exchange options, it should improve the value students get out of their meal plans and it should give us our Halal Shack hummus back.

The dining website for UTD has a feedback section that you can send in your grievances about Halal Shack to. They also have a feedback email address, at foodservice@utdallas.edu where students can demand that combo dining start valuing its Halal shack patrons more.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Keep fighting the good fight, no matter who intimidates you.